

Naomi Starkey writes...

When I agreed to write BRF's Advent book for 2010, I knew the challenge would be finding an overall theme that was not only different from other recent Advent books, but which would also be one that could inspire me to come up with 37 successive Bible readings! I had been doing some reading about pilgrimage, and it suddenly occurred to me that I could bring together two ideas. I could combine the familiar theme of 'journeying to the manger' - reflecting on the events of Christmas, towards which we 'journey' through Advent - with pilgrimage, journeying in the company of others to a destination of particular spiritual significance. And when people are on pilgrimage, it's not just the destination that matters, but all that is experienced along the way, whether individually or through interaction with others.

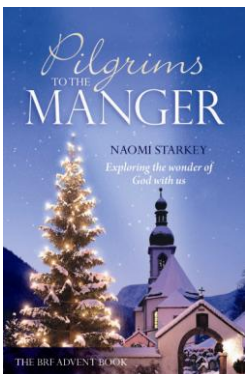


What I came up with, then, was the notion of an imaginary group of people, of whom the reader is one, making a pilgrimage that takes them in part through the streets of an average small city somewhere in the UK. As they go (and I don't identify individuals but simply use phrases such as 'the pilgrims', 'as we continue our journey' and so on), there is reflection on the seasonal festivities, on the values on which we base our lives, on some of the 'red letter days' in the Church calendar before and after Christmas, and on the events of Jesus' birth itself.

Another point I was keen to explore was that, while many people find that there is something profoundly moving about visiting a historic place of pilgrimage, we can encounter God - or that which speaks to us of God - anywhere, even in the apparently ordinary stuff of life. So my pilgrims pass through a high street, down suburban roads, to a hill top beyond the city, and to the local cathedral, with my reflections making the link between what might be experienced in such places and what can be learnt about God and faith as a result.

I hope that this makes for a lively read, helping people think about where and how they might encounter God for themselves, and reminding them that God's presence fills the world, whether they are aware of it or not. And in celebrating the birth of Jesus, what we remember above all, of course, is the amazing truth of 'God with us', right here and right now...

Naomi Starkey



[Pilgrims to the Manger](#)

Exploring the wonder of God with us

Naomi Starkey

Published September 2010. Available from your local Christian Bookshop or online at **BRF Online.**

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